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The Lugubrious Spectacle Of The CIA

It is good sense on the part of President Kennedy to order an investigation of the Central Intelligence Agency, and good news that Attorney General Robert Kennedy will take a hand in the business.

When the President announced at the outset of his administration the reappointment of CIA Chief Allen W. Dulles, there were doubts. The reappointment was equated with that of FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover, which was unfortunate because while Hoover is the more controversial of the two, he is also by long odds the more able. The record of his success is far better known than the record of Dulles' failures—many of the latter, indeed, being swathed in "top secret" classifications and bureaucratic red tape. Still, there was little disposition at the time to protest Mr. Kennedy's retention of Dulles. He is a favorite of some Republicans on Capitol Hill, for one thing; for another, Democrats and independents who look askance on the man nonetheless respected Mr. Kennedy's good will in the matter and were reluctant to criticize.

Now, however, that the Dulles organization has pulled its biggest—or anyhow most conspicuous—blooper in a long series, by misreading the temper of Cuban opinion, misjudging the time for an anti-Castro invasion, and mishandling the forces available, President Kennedy can hardly do other than insist on a close scrutiny of the CIA. It may be in greater part conducted beyond reach of the public, for reasons of national security among others, but we hope that Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, recalled from retirement to head the investigation, and Attorney General Kennedy will be as candid about their findings as practicable.

The CIA's dismal record began with its post-war inception. It includes frightful blunders of one kind or another in most major sectors of the globe, from Nationalist China through Asia, Europe, Africa, and South and Central America to the recent U2 disaster in Russia and the present confusion in Laos. (In Laos, as a case in point, the CIA spent vast amounts

of money—which it never has to account for—in backing a politician opposed to the U.S. State Department's choice, who was also receiving expensive American support. It was not the first time this incredible organization has worked at cross-purposes to other American interests—diplomatic, military, and commercial.)

One thing wrong with the CIA is that it mushroomed overnight, so to speak, from nothing to a gigantic bureaucracy with unprecedented latitude as to action and disbursement of funds. Yet it had no history, no guiding principles, no background of experience in either political or military intelligence. Even today it exists alongside the established intelligence services of the Army and Navy. The FBI's counter-espionage and internal security setup remains completely separate (a good thing, too). And until just a few weeks ago the State Department had its own intelligence branch as well, now merged with the CIA.

Moreover, the CIA is notorious for its partiality to Ivy League graduates and its obsession with social precedence on the Washington scene. It has had a succession of inconsequential chiefs, socially acceptable worthies with few qualifications for the job.

Dulles is the least amateurish of those second-raters, having at any rate been in and out of intelligence work at the administrative level as part of his long association with the State Department in minor posts. But his dossier, like that of most bureaucrats, offers no tangible clues to his shortcomings. Until now, that is. Dulles must be held responsible in some measure for the grotesque failures of the CIA under his direction, only a few of which have been publicized to any extent and some not at all.

Examining this chronical of bureaucratic clumsiness and replacing Dulles with a more competent director will not resolve all the old problems of the CIA or eliminate all the new ones, but it would be a start toward something better than we have had so far. And something better is urgently needed.